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U.S.-ROK FRICTIONS: CAUSES FOR ANTI-AMERICANISM

An Individual Study Project  
Intended for Publication

by

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U.S. Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013  
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## INTRODUCTION

1989 brought remarkable changes to the world. Who could have imagined such far-reaching changes in Eastern Europe? Who could have anticipated the removal of the Berlin Wall, which symbolized the end of the Cold War? Who could have imagined the Sino-Soviet rapprochement? These changes have been so dramatic and so rapid that the U.S. has had little opportunity to realize their full impact.

But other changes have been taking place in other places. These changes are not as drastic as the European changes, but they have significant impact on U.S. foreign relations.

One of these less publicized changes is the change in U.S.-Korean relations. These countries have had long and close relations with each other. Recently, however, there has been some concern about rising anti-American sentiment in Korea. Many Americans tend to treat anti-American sentiment lightly and consider it as an inevitable reaction to a large number of U.S. troops in Korea. President George Bush stated that "I think there exists anti-American sentiments in Korea. Korea is not an extraordinary case. Such criticism against the U.S. is airing in other nations."<sup>1</sup> President Bush's statement represents many

American views. But the perception from Korea indicates a different view.

The South Korean Ambassador to the U.S., Mr. Park Ton-jin, stated that "most American officials in Washington generally understand that anti-American sentiment is an expression of new self-confidence and nationalism which is commensurate with Korea's growing economic power."<sup>2</sup> Further, the President of Korea, Roh Tae Woo, explained that "a sense of independence that calls for turning the hierarchical relations of the past era into an equal relation is desirable, and must be differentiated from anti-American sentiment."<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, Koreans have become more and more nationalistic because of their remarkable economic growth, a successful change of the Korean presidency through direct election, and the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul. Moreover, they have initiated "NORDPOLITIK" to reduce tension through diplomatic relations with North Korea's allies. And they have modernized their armed forces, which will achieve parity with North Korean forces within the next three to five years.

However, Koreans claim that Americans have not recognized these changes and are not sensitive to the nationalistic mood of the Korean people. While they realize the importance of the U.S. military presence in Korea, they have trouble understanding the command relationship between the Combined Forces Command and the Korean military forces. They interpret this relation as an absolute situation, wherein the Korean military takes orders from

U.S. Commanding Generals for day-to-day operations. They are irritated by the location of the U.S. forces headquarters in Youngsan and U.S. forces television programs aired on the U.S. forces Korean network. Further, they strongly resent the U.S. economic pressure to open the Korean market more to American goods.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, radical students, political dissidents, and liberal religious leaders--particularly after the Kwangju incident--have all accused the U.S. of pursuit of selfish national interests in Korea.<sup>5</sup> These radicals have attempted to mobilize nationalistic fervor to further their own interests, seeking to foment violent anti-American protests.

U.S.-Korean relations in the future must acknowledge this growing Korean nationalistic attitude if harmonious relations are to continue between these two important nations. This study thus focuses on the frictions caused by Korean anti-American sentiments and the role of Korean students in the country's national politics. Data for this study has been drawn equally from Korean and English sources. The author, who was born in Korea and who spent his first twenty years there, has relied heavily on his familiarity with the Korean language and culture and upon his close relationship with Korean nationals both in and out of academic circles.



## U.S. INTERESTS IN THE REGION

The primary U.S. interest in Asia is to survive as a "free and independent nation."<sup>6</sup> To pursue American interests in the region, the U.S. must prevent a single nation or a coalition to dominate the area and must promote regional stability by promoting democracy and free trade. The U.S. seeks economic security through free access and influence in the region.<sup>7</sup> U.S. interests in Korea are therefore significant. The Korean peninsula is strategically located where all major powers--the U.S., Soviet Union, Japan, and China--come together. It also sits astride critical sea lanes of communication. Further, the U.S. deploys 43,000 troops in Korea to deter North Korean attack and to maintain regional balance. Korea is the seventh largest U.S. trading partner in the world.<sup>8</sup> It has developed the seventeenth largest economy and has become the twelfth largest trading country in the world.

### The Threat

A primary threat to U.S. interests in the region is North Korea itself. Since the Korean War, North Korea and South Korea have maintained an armistice, but a peace treaty has not been signed. Along the four kilometer wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), almost two million North and South Korean troops continuously face each other at a high state of alert. Potential for renewed armed conflict has been evident since the beginning of the shaky armistice agreement in June 1953.<sup>9</sup>

North Korea has the capability and the will to carry out armed conflict; it may be the only country which can involve the U.S. in combat with little or no warning. Since the Korean war, North Korea has demonstrated its will to conduct offensive actions: It has tunneled under the DMZ; it has shot down an unarmed U.S. EC-121; it has seized the U.S.S. Pueblo; it has killed two U.S. soldiers in the DMZ "tree cutting incident"; it has bombed Rangoon, Burma, seeking to kill President Chun; and it has killed all aboard Korean Air Line flight KAL007.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, North Korea has offensively deployed more than 65% of its armed forces of over 800,000 men within 40 miles of the DMZ. They are equipped with modern Soviet weapons and are known to have a three-to-one advantage in tanks, three-to-one advantage in artillery, and two-to-one advantage in combat aircraft.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Seoul is only 35 miles from the DMZ; the South Korean capital could come under enemy attack in less than ten minutes.

The known quality of South Korean armed forces and the presence of the U.S. military have served to deter North Korean attack and to keep peace in the Korean peninsula. While North Korea possesses the capability and the intent to attack, its immediate problem is the succession of Kim Il Sung by his son Kim Chong Il, a problem that has the potential to cause great regional instability. According to North Korean experts, Kim Il Sung plans to retire in the Spring of 1990. Then he purportedly will transfer his power to his son Kim Chong Il, who already handles 70% of governmental administration. To ensure a

successful transfer of power, Kim Il Sung has eliminated potential opposition from critical government sectors and replaced opponents with his own loyal supporters. For example, the Commander in Chief of the North Korean People's Army, General Oh Hyung Yul (age 57), was replaced by Choi Kwang (age 72)--a veteran of Kim Il Sung's guerrilla unit.<sup>12</sup>

North Korean's unpredictability and leadership dilemma threaten regional stability and pose threats to U.S. regional interests in Asia. Although popular revolution seems unlikely, an internal power struggle after the death of Kim Il Sung is very possible. The events in Eastern Europe have had little or no apparent effect on North Korea. Japanese-North Korean Friendship Committee Chairman, Mr. Guno Juchin, said that "Kim Il Sung continues to repress his people and refuses to reform his government in spite of all the changes in Eastern Europe."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Kim Il Sung is conducting ideological education to prevent an East European-style people's revolution.<sup>14</sup> Many North Korean experts believe that an Eastern Europe-style people's revolution is not very likely because of the North's total isolation from the outside world. The editor of Modern Korea, Sato Kazumi, has observed that "North Korea does not have opposition to Kim Il Sung. This is the main difference between North Korea and Eastern Europe." He further stated that "in this situation one must observe the North Korean center of power--the military."<sup>15</sup>

## FRICTIONS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND THE UNITED STATES

Since the Korean War, the U.S. and Korea have maintained close relations. This alliance has served to prevent war, promote free trade, and encourage democracy in Korea during the past 45 years. However, beginning in the early 1980s, Korea began to display a very strong nationalistic attitude. In some cases, this attitude has led to an anti-American sentiment.

### Frictions and U.S. Interests

Since the Kwangju incident in May 1980, which is discussed below, many Koreans have complained loudly that the U.S. is a selfish nation pursuing its own interest. This has been one cause for anti-American sentiment among the populace.

Three prime examples are given to prove their complaints. They say that American selfishness dates from the Taft-Kastura Agreement in 1905. In this agreement, the U.S. secretly agreed with the Japanese that Japan would control Korea while America would control the Philippines. Not knowing the deal, many Koreans fruitlessly attempted to gain U.S. support for independence from Japanese.<sup>16</sup> Their second example supports a claim that the U.S. is "Counter-Revolutionary" and responsible for supporting a South Korean dictatorship. From 1945 to 1948, the U.S. Military government in Korea assisted President Rhee to defeat a well organized left-wing movement. Some believe that the leftist movement would have survived and would have prevented

an authoritarian South Korean regime if it were not for the U.S.<sup>17</sup> In addition, U.S. support for Rhee's regime caused a divided Korea and perpetuated the division, according to this claim.<sup>18</sup> The final example is the Kwangju incident in May 1980.<sup>19</sup> Many Koreans in Kwangju naively expected that the U.S.--the great symbol of democracy and human rights--would come to the aid of citizens of Kwangju by military intervention against the South Korean Army.<sup>20</sup> A student activist, Kim Eun-Chang, stated that "during the Kwangju incident, the citizen soldiers arrested anyone stating anti-American slogans and, moreover, awaited the arrival of U.S. forces."<sup>21</sup> Koreans could not believe that the U.S. not only did not come to their aid but also continued to support the South Korean government. They realized that the American priority was "realpolitik": to maintain regional stability, despite violations of human rights.<sup>22</sup> In addition, when newly elected President Reagan received Chun Doo Hwan as the first foreign head of a nation to visit the new President, Koreans became more certain that the U.S. approved Chun's violent suppression and approved of his regime as well.<sup>23</sup>

A leaflet distributed by Seoul National University students stated that "The U.S., seeing an imminent crisis in the growing Korean people's struggle in the 1970s, reorganized the country's ruling system through preventive measures on October 26, 1979" (date of Park Chung-hee assassination). It went on to ask "can we continue forever to think of the U.S. as a friendly country?"<sup>24</sup>

Such skepticism--seen in many intellectuals, religious leaders, dissidents and students--became the cause for increasing anti-American sentiments. Many Koreans believed that the U.S. supported Chun in pursuit of its own national interests.<sup>25</sup>

#### U.S. TROOPS IN KOREA: MORE FRICTION

The United States military has a long history of relations with Korea. It liberated Korea from Japan in 1945, established a military government from 1945 to 1948 to assist the Korean government, and fought alongside South Koreans to defeat the North Korean attack in the early 1950s. Since the war, the U.S.-Korean Mutual Security Treaty of 1953 has provided the backbone for defense of the Republic of Korea.

The U.S. military presence has deterred war and maintained peace on the Korean peninsula.<sup>26</sup> Koreans have generally supported the presence of the U.S. military on the peninsula, as indicated by the following polls: In late 1988 the Democratic Justice Party Research Department poll indicated that 70% supported strong U.S.-Korean relations, 60% supported continuation of Team Spirit exercises, and only 20% supported the radical student anti-American movement.<sup>27</sup> The Korean Gallop group of October 1989, conducted at the request of the Ministry of National Defense, showed that 84% of South Koreans believed that U.S. military presence helped to maintain peace and security; 72% did not want U.S. troops to withdraw.<sup>28</sup>

But while the majority of Koreans have supported U.S. military presence in Korea, some began to raise nationalistic issues concerning the "future character" of U.S. military presence.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, they questioned the current structure of the Combined Forces Command (CFC) and its command relationship with Korean forces. Other questions concerned the CFC's role in Kwangju incident, the presence of nuclear weapons in Korea, location of CFC headquarters in downtown Seoul, and open broadcasts of the Armed Forces Korea Network Television (AFKN-TV).<sup>30</sup>

#### Combined Forces Command

The Combined Forces Command (CFC) has been the center of controversy and misunderstanding. In 1978, in anticipation of U.S. troop withdrawal, the U.S. and Korean governments agreed to establish a combined command which would facilitate the return of U.S. forces in times of crises. The Commander-in-Chief (CINC) has all along been a U.S. General who heads the CFC and the United Nations Command. The CINC CFC also serves as CINC of U.S. Forces Korea, the Eighth U.S. Army, and the Ground Component Command.<sup>31</sup>

In wartime the CINC CFC will command and control all U.S. and Korean forces in Korea. However, in peace he exercises operational control (OPCON) over only those forces assigned to the CFC. At present, both the U.S. and Korean governments have not assigned all the forces in Korea to CFC. Moreover, except in

the event of North Korean attack, each government may withdraw units under CFC when an individual government makes the decision based on its own needs. The only requirement is that the government notify the CINC CFC of the intent to withdraw forces. Therefore, if the Korean government decides to take a unit from CFC control for domestic employment and makes proper notification, the CINC CFC cannot stop the action.<sup>32</sup>

This confusing command relationship causes misunderstandings between the U.S. and Korean officials; also it creates increased anti-American sentiment among radical students and political opposition leaders. The Kwangju incident underscores the confusing command problems, which then contributed to anti-American sentiment.

#### Kwangju: The beginning of anti-Americanism

In early May 1980 the Korean government was experiencing serious city-wide riots in Kwangju. On 18 May the ROK government dispatched 3,000 Special Warfare soldiers to control the unrest. During the process of riot control, the soldiers killed more than 200 citizens. Again, on 26 May the Korean 20th Division deployed to Kwangju to bring the riot under control.<sup>33</sup>

Many Koreans believed that all Korean forces were under CFC command and control. Thus they blamed the U.S. for releasing these units to be used in Kwangju in support of the authoritarian Chun. Ironically, these units were not under CFC control. The Special Warfare units which killed the most people belonged to



the Korean Special Warfare Command, which has never been under control of CFC. Moreover, the 20th Division's command and control was transferred from CFC to the Korean Army as of 26 October, 1979--the day President Park was assassinated--to deal with possible civil unrest.<sup>34</sup>

However, the U.S. was not able to explain these facts because Korean emotional reaction to Kwangju was so high that many Koreans would not believe the explanation. This tragic incident, exacerbated by inappropriate comments or actions from U.S. officials, further fueled the claims that American priorities were security and economic interest over human rights. Consider the following examples:<sup>35</sup>

- President Carter approved \$600 million aid to Korea within a week after the Kwangju incident. This was delivered in person by Mr. John Moore, the President of the U.S. Export-Import Bank.<sup>36</sup> Many Koreans saw this appropriation as a "reward" for Chun's violent suppression of the Kwangju riots.

- In August 1980 General Wickham, CINC CFC, made the statement to reporters that "the U.S. will support Chun if he comes to power legitimately." Chun, acting upon this sympathetic remark, forced President Choi to resign. Then he became the President on 1 September.<sup>37</sup>

- On 22 September 1980 two senior bankers--Mr. David Rockefeller, Chairman, Chase Manhattan Bank; and Mr. William Spencer, President, Citibank--visited Korea and publicly urged rapid stabilization in South Korea to facilitate conduct of

business as usual.<sup>38</sup> Again, many Koreans viewed this as a "slap in the face" to human rights and an endorsement of business as usual.

Thus the circumstances surrounding the Kwangju incident did not put the U.S. in the best light. The confusing command relations of CFC and the untimely, inept actions of U.S. officials added to emotional reactions and contributed to anti-American sentiments. Further, radical students, political dissidents, and North Korean propaganda continue to exploit the incident at every opportunity.

In January 1987 Mr. William Glysteen, former ambassador to Korea during the Kwangju incident, attempted to explain that the 20th Division had not participated in the killing because he only authorized the entrance of the 20th Division into the city at a time after the atrocities in question had occurred.<sup>39</sup> The problem with this statement is that even a complete truth coming as an explanation seven years after the event seems superfluous and unconvincing. Further, unfortunately, Mr. Glysteen still thinks that the 20th Division was under CFC control.

### Nuclear Weapons

Lately a growing number of Koreans have expressed concern over the presence of nuclear weapons in Korea. The U.S., as a matter of policy, does not acknowledge or deny the presence of nuclear weapons on the peninsula. However, a North Korean newspaper stated on 30 November 1989 that "South Korea is the

largest nuclear base in the Far East." This source claimed that the U.S. deploys "more than 1,000 different nuclear weapons in South Korea."<sup>40</sup> The North Koreans have always demanded withdrawal of U.S. troops and nuclear weapons before any serious reunification negotiations. Thus, the apparent presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea angers radical students and dissidents who thus blame the U.S. for unsuccessful reunification efforts.

Lately, however, some moderates as well are concerned about the presence of nuclear weapons. The President of the Korean National Council of Churches stated that "the Pentagon's nuclear strategy in Korea threatened the survival of the Korean people, making our survival dependent on a foreign power, a situation that reminds us that American policy has been geared to American interests rather than to the development of the Korean people."<sup>41</sup> Until recently, nuclear weapons issues have not been a matter for open debate. However, with rapid democratization and a rising nationalistic attitude, it will lead to more friction in future U.S. Korean relations.

#### Other Issues

The location of CFC headquarters and the AFKN-TV have caused more friction. The U.S. forces have been in the Youngsan area since the Korean War. What was formerly a suburb of Seoul has become prime real estate in the past 36 years. The location has become a symbol of U.S. presence; it is an emotional issue for

many nationalistic Koreans. According to General Menetry, CINC CFC, this friction should be resolved soon. He told reporters in December 1989 that "I expect the bilateral negotiations to be concluded in the next few months."<sup>42</sup> The U.S. and Korean government have agreed to move the CFC headquarters; however, the exact location and time of the move have not been announced.

AFKN-TV programs have as well caused some conflict. Some Koreans argue that some AFKN programs erode traditional Korean value systems. They want the programs broadcast on either UHF or cable. Both governments are negotiating to decide who will pay for the cost of changes.<sup>43</sup> This appears to be more of a symbolic issue than an issue of substance, because it is difficult to demonstrate that the programming erodes Korean values more than other such influences. Even so, it is a sensitive matter.

#### FRICTIONS AND NATIONALISM

##### Korean Government

The Korean government and the U.S. government have had quite good relations overall for many years. However, lately this relationship has changed, as we have seen. Anti-American sentiment among the South Korean people may, in fact, increase.

The South Koreans are proud of their accomplishments in the 1980s. They have improved their average per capita income from \$86 in 1960 to \$2,800 in 1987.<sup>44</sup> They successfully conducted the 1988 Olympics. They have made even greater progress in democratization of Korea through a successful, relatively

peaceful transfer of presidency. This dynamic economic development and the election campaigns of the 1987 Presidential election and 1988 National Assembly election have propelled Korean nationalism to an all-time high. The Koreans have become increasingly critical of unfriendly gestures and economic pressure from abroad.<sup>45</sup> President Roh represents the popular Korean attitude: He told a reporter in October 1989 that "a sense of independence that calls for turning the hierarchical relations of the past into equal relations is desirable and must be differentiated from anti-American sentiment. Sound criticism must be positively accepted for the development of Korea-U.S. relations."<sup>46</sup>

The nationalism is even more fervent in the National Assembly, as is shown by the fact that the ruling party (Roh's) did not capture the majority during the most recent election. This means that Roh must now be more sensitive to a highly nationalistic assembly as well as numerous political interest groups.<sup>47</sup> Recently, however, Roh announced that his party will merge with the Reunification Democratic Party and the New Democratic Republican Party to establish a majority power base. Overall, this continuing democratization has raised the expectations of the Korean people; they want leaders with vision, and to act according to Korean national interests.<sup>48</sup>

### Nationalistic Foreign Policy

President Roh announced the "Northern Policy" (Nordpolitik) during his inauguration speech in February 1988. The purpose of this policy is to reduce North-South Korea tensions through improved relations with North Korean's allies, such as the Soviet Union, China, and various Eastern European countries.<sup>49</sup> Since the 1988 Olympics, Korea has established diplomatic relations with Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia. It is also negotiating formal relations with East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. Further, it has agreed to exchange Consulate Generals with the Soviet Union. The South Korean government, recognizing the importance of this relationship, has as well posted an ambassadorial level person as the Consulate in Moscow.<sup>50</sup>

In October 1988, during a speech at the United Nations, President Roh proposed a six nation (the U.S., Soviet Union, China, Japan, and North and South Korea) "Peace Conference" to discuss Korean reunification issues.<sup>51</sup> In response to this, Mr. Gaston Sigur, Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, expressed the U.S. position: "the U.S. will support any effort to reunify the Korean peninsula, but he also cautioned that North-South reunification should be solved by Koreans."<sup>52</sup> A highly nationalistic Korean foreign policy has not been a serious conflict in bilateral relations in the past. But it certainly has the potential to impinge on U.S. global interests in the future.

### North-South Reunification

The reunification issue presents a most difficult challenge for both Korean governments. The on-again, off-again nature of the relationship indicates that both sides are still far apart; actual reunification may, in fact, be far in the future. The reunification approaches of each side are completely different. North Korea is taking an all-or-nothing approach, which requires both political and military decisions. On the other hand, South Korea advocates a gradual approach, which will begin with confidence-building steps, such as sports exchanges, family reunions, trade, etc.<sup>53</sup> Although many Koreans believe that North Korea is not serious and is just buying time in its quest to dominate the Korean peninsula, the negotiations should continue as a means for reducing tensions.

### Korean Domestic Political Challenges

A stable political situation in Korea is in the best interests of both the U.S. and Korea. However, President Roh faces tough political challenges. He must continue to democratize Korea proportionately to its economic growth. He must act independently from U.S. influence to gain sustained support from the Korean people.<sup>54</sup> He must resolve the Chun government's corruption and complete the investigation of the Kwangju incident. These are difficult tasks for Roh, because he has close personal and political ties to Chun. However, Roh called Chun to testify before the National Assembly, which is the

first time in Korean history a political head of state has done so.<sup>55</sup> The final decision is yet to come. Nevertheless, the U.S. may be involved in these political nightmares, which could re-ignite Korean anger and anti-Americanism.

The recent development of a three-party merger will bring more serious political challenges to Roh's government. On 22 January 1990, President Roh announced that his ruling party--the Democratic Justice Party--will merge with two opposition parties of the Reunification Democratic Party led by Kim Young-sam, and the New Democratic Republican Party led by Kim Chong-pil.<sup>56</sup> As a result of this merger, the ruling party will have 216 of the 299 parliamentary seats against the 70 seats of the sole opposition. The remaining 11 seats belong to the independents or the assemblymen who did not participate in the merger. Two other seats are vacant at this time.<sup>57</sup>

Roh explained that a merger is necessary to eliminate the perception of political instability caused by a four-party system. Kim Young-sam supported the merger, noting that "It is now time to end polarized confrontation between democratic forces and non-democratic forces. Such a polarization is no longer necessary since all politicians have agreed to put to rest the controversies over the past."<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, the only remaining opposition leader, Kim Dae-jung, President of the Party for Peace and Democracy, said that the merger is "a nasty political trick which amounts to a coup." In protesting, he promised to collect ten million



signatures on the petitions calling for a new election to block one-party dictatorship.<sup>59</sup>

While the merger will provide strong majority political power in the National Assembly for Roh, it will also worsen the traditional regional political factionism. Kim Dae-jung is from Kwangju, and much of his political power is based in the Cholla provinces. Many residents of the province believe that they are not treated equally compared to the other Koreans. The merger may cause a political unrest if the opposition continues its promises of blocking the merger and is supported by the opportunistic radical students.

#### FRICTIONS AND THE KOREAN ECONOMY

##### Economic Growth

The economic situations in both countries has changed drastically, thereby impacting on U.S.-Korean relations. From 1946 to 1976 the U.S. dominated the relationship by providing \$12.5 billion for economic growth and recovery from the Korean War. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the U.S. continued to play a key role in assisting the Korean government in shaping and directing the Korean economy from import-dependent to export-oriented. In addition, the U.S. provided finances and a U.S. market for Korean export goods.<sup>60</sup>

In the mid-1970s, however, economic relations began to change. The Korean economy displayed significant growth and began to compete with the U.S. for international markets. In

response to aggressive Korean economic ventures, the U.S. began to demand fair market access in Korea. In the 1980s this economic competition caused serious friction between the two countries as the American trade and budget deficits rose to an all-time high. To reduce the trade deficits, the U.S. pressured for access to the Korean market, but these efforts met with stubborn nationalistic responses. The economic problem thus became a political problem, which has led to anti-American sentiment.<sup>61</sup>

In mid-1986, the Korean economy began to explode. Their GNP increased 15% in 1987, but their consumer price increase remained below 3% throughout 1984, 1985 and 1986. These circumstances reduced foreign debts from \$47 billion in 1985 down to \$39 billion in 1987.<sup>62</sup> The unemployment rate of 7.7% in 1985 decreased to 3.8% in 1986. That year Korea became the 12th leading trading nation in the world, with a \$3.5 billion trade surplus.<sup>63</sup> Eventually, Korea became the eighth largest export market for the U.S. and the seventh greatest source of imports in the world. The U.S. became the leading Korean export market, receiving 35% of Korean exports and 40% of the ROK GNP.<sup>64</sup>

This phenomenal Korean economic growth has caused huge trade deficits in the U.S., which have grown from \$4.3 billion in 1985, to \$7.3 billion in 1986, and to \$9.5 billion in 1987.<sup>65</sup> During the same period, U.S. exports to Korea increased at an average annual rate of 1.5% from 1981 to 1986.<sup>66</sup> America's persistent urge to open the Korean market to more U.S. goods has met with

slow responses--even no response. In 1985 Korea reluctantly agreed to lift restrictions on 600 items over a three-year period.<sup>67</sup> Starting in 1988, the U.S. trade deficit began to decrease from \$8.47 billion to \$6.5 billion in 1989 (estimated).<sup>68</sup>

### Korean Perceptions

Although Korea is enjoying a remarkable economic growth, many Koreans feel that they are desperately dependent on the U.S. market. They feel that the U.S. should be more understanding of their emergent needs and fragile, small-nation status. They point out that Korea is a small country with \$39 billion foreign debts, whereas the U.S. trade deficit with Korea is only 5% of the total U.S. trade deficit.<sup>69</sup> Koreans feel that American pressure for market access is unreasonable. When U.S. pressure continued for increased market access, particularly for beef and agricultural products, the Koreans responded very emotionally. Korean politicians, economists, business executives and scholars all believe that "Korea is already doing or committed to doing enough, if not more than enough, to reduce trade friction."<sup>70</sup> A Korean newspaper reported that Korea could likely be the world's second largest buyer of U.S. agricultural products. Korea has spent \$46.2 million in the first nine months of 1989, which is ten times more than the last year's figures.<sup>71</sup>

While Korea's economy appears to be on a solid foundation, it is also seriously vulnerable to imports, Won appreciation and

labor disputes. These factors often spill over into the political situation and into U.S.-Korean relations.

### Economic Vulnerability

Impacts of Imports: Korea has been very reluctant to meet U.S. demands for market accessibility. However, it has begun to respond to U.S. pressures. The following examples illustrate the vulnerability of Korean agriculture to the imports: In late 1989 tangerine prices decreased 45% compared to the previous year's prices. The reasons for this drastic change in price are over-production, elimination of a requirement for 30% content of Korean tangerines in all Korean juice products, and availability of cheaply imported concentrated orange juice. During this period, pork prices went down 30% because pig farming increased to 16% and canned imported pork goods increased to 50%.<sup>72</sup> Examples like these demonstrate the impact of imported goods on the domestic agricultural market. In the eyes of reluctant Korean officials and helpless farmers, imported agricultural products are the main cause for their problems, even though other factors have contributed to the problems.

Impacts of Won appreciation: The U.S. also wanted to appreciate the Korean Won as a means to control serious trade deficits with Korea.<sup>73</sup> Korean officials disagreed with Won appreciation. They felt that the current surplus trend has not gone long enough; they believe it may even reverse its course. Moreover, they are extremely sensitive to domestic perceptions,

caused by the nationalistic mood in Korea, of surrender to U.S. pressure.<sup>74</sup> Won appreciation would severely impact on an export-oriented Korean economy, since Korean goods would become more expensive. Korean automobile exports demonstrate this possibility: Hyundai sold 255,382 cars in 1988, compared to 141,962 cars in 1989. Dae Woo, which produces Pontiac Le Mans, sold 46,693 cars in 1988, compared to 16,358 cars in 1989.<sup>75</sup> The Won appreciation was a significant factor in both declines. But Korean auto industries were also late in producing new models and thus lost out to the Japanese competition in autos. They also developed profitable domestic markets.<sup>76</sup> However, Hyundai officials are still worried about the price increases caused by Won appreciation. A four door Excel cost \$7,095 in 1986, but it cost \$5,724 in 1989. Japanese cars, on the other hand, became more competitive with prices ranging from \$7,000 to \$9,000. The Japanese cars also offer better benefits, such as a 2.5% interest rate (compared to 12% for Hyundai) and \$1,500 to \$2,500 rebates (compared to \$300 to \$1,000 Hyundai rebate).<sup>77</sup> While Won appreciation is not the only reason for poor auto industry exports, it definitely threatens the foundation of Korean economy. Continued pressure for Won appreciation will hurt both the U.S. and Korean economies in the long run.

**Impacts of Labor-Management Disputes:** Starting in mid-1986, labor-management disputes in Korea became serious. The labor representatives demanded wage increases and the right to form unions. During peak labor problems from June to September 1987,

there were 3,000 individual labor disputes. Wage increases at the end of this period shot up 15 to 20 percent. These disputes caused price increases of 2.6 percent as well as a 6 percent reduction in GNP growth.<sup>78</sup> A terrible side effect of these labor disputes has been the workers' loss of concentration on the job, which has in turn increased the rate of defective products.

For sales representatives stationed in overseas areas, the labor disputes and increase in defects have meant a 20 percent increase of prices and a corresponding loss of competitive edge. Mr. Kim Chang-young, Three Star Distributions in Frankfort, Germany, said that "Korean products regressed three years to five years. Defective items doubled to 10 percent, and in some worse cases, defective rates reached 50 percent of a shipment." Mr. Choi, Dae Woo Representative, noted that "Won appreciation and wage increases caused price increases in many items which resulted in a loss of competitive edge." He further stated that "Japan and Germany produce technically improved items every year, and Thailand, Indonesia and Taiwan are right behind us. Therefore, any price increase or poor quality products will severely hamper the export market."<sup>79</sup>

Won appreciation, wage increases, increases of defective items, declining profits, and continuous labor-management disputes have brought additional economic problems to Korea. These problems have forced about 30 foreign factories to close their plants in Korea. The Japanese-owned Sumida Electronic Company President, Mr. Kaichi Kushino, returned to Japan in the

middle of a labor-management dispute. Later he sent a FAX message to announce closure of the plant without any explanation. Sumida workers, demanding an explanation and severance pay, demonstrated at the Japanese Chamber of Commerce. Twenty-nine workers were arrested, but the protest continues. A similar situation developed with the American-owned Pico Korea Company and T. C. Electronic Korea Company; the managers closed the plants, blaming declining profits. The workers demonstrated at the U.S. Embassy to demand separation wages.<sup>80</sup>

These labor disputes have spilled over into Korean domestic politics and U.S.-Korean relations. This presents a serious situation for both countries. A review of Korean sources indicates that U.S. pressure for market access and Won appreciation will contribute to more closures and more serious labor-related protests. The radical students will exploit opportunities to incite anti-American sentiments. Therefore, the U.S. must handle economic issues with Korea with extreme care.

#### POLITICIZED KOREAN STUDENTS: MORE FRICTION

Throughout Korean history, students have been a powerful political force and have had a significant impact on Korean history. The reasons for this student involvement in politics are traditional Korean respect for students and a long tolerance of students in Korean politics.

Many Koreans have romanticized students "as having valid viewpoints, because their view is pure."<sup>81</sup> Further, many Koreans

are generally sympathetic toward students because they themselves have had experience in protesting against the government. One Korean businessman's comment represented this view: "Oh, don't be too hard on the students; I marched in the street when I was in school."<sup>82</sup> Whether or not the students' views are pure, they have played a key role in Korean history. They conducted anti-Japanese and independence movements in 1905 and 1945. They supported President Rhee in neutralizing the opposition after the Korean War; then they also brought Rhee down from power during the 19 April 1960 Student Revolution.<sup>83</sup> They also demonstrated against the authoritarian Park regime in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, in the 1980s, with dynamic economic development and trends toward a younger population, the character of the student movement has changed. The students have adopted a Marxist-Leninist ideology as the foundation for their movement. They have penetrated existing student councils and labor organizations to promote their ideology and to mobilize them for their cause. They have become extremely violent with their indiscriminate use of fire bombs. They have committed suicides by setting fire to themselves to ignite emotions during rallies. Although the actual numbers of active radical students are small, they have the capability to mobilize other students, workers and the sympathetic Korean population.



### Demographic Changes in Korea

A demographically favorable situation supports student involvement in politics. Since the Korean war, the young population has grown rapidly and become a significant factor in Korean elections: sixty percent of the Korean population is less than 30 years old. Sixty-two percent of the eligible voters are between the ages of 15 and 39.<sup>84</sup>

The young generations are more nationalistic because they have not personally witnessed U.S. contributions to liberation in 1945 and to the Korean War in 1950.<sup>85</sup> But they do recall the questionable role of the U.S. in the Kwangju incident in 1980 and the continuing U.S. pressure for market access during the 1980s. To this younger generation, the U.S. is just another country out to fulfill its own interests.

### ORGANIZED RADICAL STUDENT MOVEMENT

#### 1980 to 1986: The Beginning

Anti-American sentiment became a public issue after the Kwangju incident. Many "conscientized groups"--students, labor, intellectuals and organized church groups--ask hard questions:

What caused the division of Korea?

Who is to blame?

Who sustained the various dictatorships in Korea?

What is the nature of South Korea's economic system?

Who controls South Korea?<sup>86</sup>

The radical students believe that the U.S. is responsible for the dictatorship in Korea which has "repressed freedom in the name of fighting communism, perpetuated poverty, and condemned millions." They also argue that "the U.S. is the main obstacle to political and social change in Korea."<sup>87</sup>

Student movements during 1981 to 1982 were underground. They refined their ideology, called the "conscientization movement"--a neo-Marxist and anti-American movement.<sup>88</sup> The first symbolic anti-American attack came on 18 March 1982 when a group of radical students set fire to the American Cultural Center in Pusan. One of the students read the following statement: "The United States has supported the military regime which refused democratization, social revolution and development of unification. In fact, the United States has brought about permanent national division. We must resolve this problem. Let us stage an anti-U.S. struggle to eliminate U.S. power which is rampant in this country."<sup>89</sup> This attack on the American Cultural Center was the first public exposure of anti-American sentiment and was the first violent act against American property.

On 17 April 1985 students organized the National Federation of Students Association (Chonhaknyon), and radical students formed its political arm of Sammintu. The Sammintu stood for "the Struggle Committee for the Liberation of the Masses (Minjung), the attainment of Democracy (Minju), and Unification of the Nation (Minzuk)."<sup>90</sup> The Sammintu specifically formulated a strategy of promoting student relations with labor, uniting

political action against Chun's regime, and conducting direct attack on symbolic American targets.<sup>91</sup> In May 1985 the Sammintu occupied the U.S. Information Services (USIS) facility for three days, demanding a formal apology for the U.S. role in the Kwangju incident.<sup>92</sup> The Korean government declared that Sammintu was an illegal organization and arrested the majority of its leadership.<sup>93</sup> Again, the Sammintu went underground and reverted to small protests. On 12 August 1985 five students attempted to "invade" the U.S. Embassy, and in November 1985 14 students occupied the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.<sup>94</sup> These protests were against U.S. pressure for agricultural products but did not incite mass anti-American sentiments.

#### Spring of 1986: Mobilization of the Masses

The spring of 1986 brought drastic changes to the world. The authoritarian Marcos regime in the Philippines was brought to an end by "people power." In addition, President Reagan sent a message entitled "Freedom, Regional Security and Global Peace" to the U.S. Congress, outlining his new policy that friendly anti-communist, authoritarian governments without the support of their people cannot expect continued U.S. support. Several Korean newspapers carried the story and editors analyzed the significance of this message for Korean government.<sup>95</sup>

At the same time, a serious political situation faced the Korean government. While President Chun wanted to wait until 1989 to change the indirect method of presidential election (that

is, until after the 1988 presidential election), the opposition parties initiated action to propose constitutional amendment for direct presidential elections for 1988. The opposition parties formed the Liaison Organization for Democracy in an effort to consolidate the fight.<sup>96</sup> The other challenge for Chun was refusal of sophomore students to participate in mandatory six-day military training at frontline positions.<sup>97</sup> This presented a major challenge for the Korean government, which has always placed the highest priority on national security as it faces North Korea.

In the context of this national political unrest and the changing international situation, the radical students resurfaced. They reorganized the illegal Sammintu into two separate organizations with different ideologies. The first organization is the National, Anti-U.S., Anti-Fascist Student Federation for National Sovereignty and Democracy. It is also known as the NL, which follows Kim Il Sung's ideology of "chuche," which stands for self-reliance, reunification and anti-U.S. struggle. The second organization is the Struggle Committee for National Independence. It is also known as the People's Democracy (PD) or Minmintu. The PD follows a Marxist-Leninist ideology; it emphasizes solidarity with the masses and with labor movements.<sup>98</sup>

On 18 March 1986, 300 students from Seoul National University (SNU) became involved in the first large public anti-American protest since the Korean War period.<sup>99</sup> Later, SNU

students formed the Anti-U.S. and Anti-Fascist Fighting Committee for Achieving Independence and Democracy to mobilize the student body for more serious protests.<sup>100</sup> The violence continued, then during a student protest on 28 April 1986 two students poured kerosene on themselves and committed suicide by setting themselves on fire.<sup>101</sup> Emotions were running high on both sides-- with the government, which tried to control the situation; and with the radical students, who were looking for an opportunity to bring Chun's regime down.

On 3 May 1986 the radical students attempted to incite Kwangju-like unrest during a Constitutional Amendment rally. Even though their efforts failed, they certainly demonstrated their effective organization and coordination as they mobilized the students and workers.<sup>102</sup> On 3 May, the New Korean Democratic Party (NKDP) planned to have a peaceful rally in Inchon to promote constitutional amendment. The NKDP scheduled the rally at 2 p.m., but around 1 p.m. about 3,000 students and workers initiated violent protests. One student attempted suicide by setting himself on fire but was saved. The student demonstrators set fire to the Democratic Justice Party office in Inchon, to a 2.5 ton police tear gas van and to a sedan belonging to the NKDP.<sup>103</sup> The police finally brought the riot under control late that evening. During this same period, more than 900 professors from various universities and colleges across the country publicly supported the student protests through a signed "Declaration on the Current Situation." They proclaimed that a

return to civilian government would be the only way to end the current unrest. They wholeheartedly supported the demonstrations.<sup>104</sup>

These protests demonstrated the significant political role of the radical students and their ability to mobilize the full spectrum of Korean society from college professors to workers and farmers.<sup>105</sup> The students also revealed the violent nature of their actions, ranging from fire bombs to suicide.

#### October 1989: Symbolic Anti-American Attack

Other than unsuccessful attempts in July 1989 to take over the U.S. Cultural Center in Seoul, radical student protests have not been directed against Americans. But on 13 October 1989 six radical students, the so-called "Patriotic Suicide Squad," attacked the U.S. Ambassador to Korea, Mr. Donald Craig, in his residence. The ambassador and his wife escaped without harm, but the students caused more than \$30,000 worth of damage.<sup>106</sup> The attack deserves a close examination in order to understand the circumstances surrounding this symbolic anti-American attack.<sup>107</sup>

The NL element has been the leader in the student political movement. However, it began to lose its influence and credibility after sending a student representative to North Korea to participate in Pyongyang Celebrations without the concurrence of the PD element.<sup>108</sup> The NL element was thus looking for an opportunity to regain its leadership through a symbolic anti-American attack. It planned to demonstrate against Ambassador

Craig for his role as the CIA Station Chief in Korea during the 1970s and his perceived role in the Contra Affair. But it missed its initial opportunity because the ambassador arrived on a weekend.

While in Seoul on 22 September 1989 to promote free access to the Korean market for U.S. beef and other agricultural products, U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills stated that the "U.S. will bar imports of selected Korean products unless Korea's borders are open to more beef imports."<sup>109</sup> She also stated that "Korea has violated U.S. law by restricting beef imports and could face trade retaliation."<sup>110</sup> In response to this, Korea's Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mr. Kim Sik, reaffirmed his government's determination not to open the beef market completely despite the U.S. threat to take retaliatory actions. He said that "We will take counter measures if the U.S. government takes action based on a unilateral decision."<sup>111</sup>

At the same time, the emotional Korean newspaper editorials aroused public resentment against U.S. pressure for market access. The Korea Times (in English) used phrases like "saber rattling attitude with her repetition of retaliation threat" and concluded that "successive visits by high ranking American officials in recent days no doubt have gotten on the nerves of the people here."<sup>112</sup> Likewise, the Tong-A-Ilbo (in Korean) editorial title said "We say no to U.S. pressure on Korea with a threat of trade retaliation--various opinions of people on Carla Hill's visit to Korea." It also called on the U.S. "to withdraw

its heavy-handed and unfair pressure on Korea to open up its markets."<sup>113</sup> Kyonghyang Sinmun (in Korean) titled its editorial "U.S. Do not make haste--Do not consider us a Second Japan in pressuring us to open our market."<sup>114</sup> The Choson Ilbo (in Korean) titled its editorial "No more concessions to the U.S.--This is because we have washed away our original sin of record trade surplus."<sup>115</sup>

Given these widespread reactions to Carla Hill's trade threats, the NL element decided to attack the ambassador's residence on the occasion of President Roh's state visit with President Bush. They sought to arouse anti-Americanism over beef import issues and to incite serious anti-American demonstrations. Furthermore, they wanted to embarrass President Roh. Most importantly, the NL wanted to regain its failing leadership.<sup>116</sup>

Ironically, their violent action drew serious criticism from all newspaper editorials. The editorials generally labelled their attempt as a "reckless attack, much more serious and regrettable than any other attacks." One editorial emphasized that "the violence of anti-U.S. sentiment should no longer be tolerated."<sup>117</sup> For the anti-American propaganda week on 14 and 15 October, the NL could not mobilize enough students to be regarded as a viable radical group. The police estimated that about 5,000 students from 26 universities and colleges demonstrated throughout the country."<sup>118</sup> Although the NL's effort was unsuccessful, this incident once again revealed the violent nature of the radical students and their potential impact on



U.S.-Korean relations. Likewise, it seems to reveal that mainstream ROK politics is not reflexively susceptible to radical anti-American activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

U.S.-Korean relations are changing, perhaps not as remarkably as in Eastern Europe. Even so, significant changes will impact on U.S. foreign policy.

This study has described many frictions that may become a cause for anti-American sentiment in Korea. Ambassador Park Tong-jin's statement most accurately describes the anti-American sentiment from the Korean perspective: "anti-American sentiment is an expression of self-confidence and nationalism . . . commensurate with Korea's growing economic power." Moreover, President Roh explained that the expression of nationalism is not the same as anti-American sentiments. Roh's definition of nationalism includes "a sense of independence" and recommends "a change of hierarchal relations to equal relations."

While the majority of Koreans support the presence of U.S. troops in Korea, as indicated in the polls, they have become more nationalistic than ever before. Nationalism has resulted from: Korean perceptions of enormous success in economic development, peaceful transfer of power, growing military power, and both Korean success in running the Olympics as well as Korean accomplishments in The Games. Koreans certainly have earned the right to be proud of their varied accomplishments.

At the same time, Korea has significant weaknesses which require continued U.S. support. Korean armed forces expect to reach rough parity with an unpredictable North Korea in the next three to five years. Until that time, the Korean government must have U.S. military support if Korea is to survive as an independent, democratic nation.

The Korean political situation also requires U.S. support. President Roh is faced with rectifying the misconduct of Chun's regime, with impartially investigating the Kwangju incident, with offsetting opposition to the three-party merger opposition, and with constructively addressing nationalistic mood of the Korean people. The U.S. must as well be sensitive to these factors in dealing with the Korean government. Any excessive pressure from the U.S. on Korea will place the Korean government in a vulnerable position. In addition, although the radical students have lost their political credibility for now, they are surely waiting for an opportunity to regroup and bring down Roh's government. The U.S. must take into account the student organizations' capability to mobilize the masses.

The Korean economy is also at a critical juncture--vulnerable to imports, Won appreciation and labor disputes. These problems, combined with the other untimely economic problems, will threaten the foundation of the export-oriented Korean economy. It would be a total disaster if the radical student elements gained complete control of the labor organizations and ignited nationwide labor protests. Heavy-

handed U.S. dealing for market access could have equally serious impacts on the Korean economy. The U.S. must exercise caution when dealing with economic issues.

During President Roh's visit with President Bush, he implied that Korea is not fully capable of meeting U.S. demands for more access to Korean markets because of the current domestic situation. He cautioned that "If the apple is picked before it is ripe, it is tough and sour. But if you wait, it is nice and sweet." President Bush also responded that "You don't want the ripening to take so long that you're too old to enjoy the fruit." President Bush's statement accurately described the immediate U.S. concern for market access, needed to reduce rising U.S. trade deficits. However, based on the weaknesses discussed in this study, Korea may not be able to respond to the U.S. requests and continue its political, military and economic growth.

The U.S. must view U.S.-Korean relations from a global perspective. The U.S. has a vital interest in maintaining access to the region for trade and markets, preventing single nation or alliance domination in the area and maintaining regional stability. To maintain influence in the region, the U.S. must continue favorable relations with Korea, which is strategically located at the point where the interests of the U.S., Soviet Union, China and Japan come together. The U.S. also shares common interests with Korea as economic trade partners, sponsors of democracy and combined military forces. More importantly, the U.S. has been the role model for a democratic form of government

in Korea, and the U.S. has assisted Korea to become a self-determined liberal democratic country with a free economy. Korea's aggressive economic competition should not surprise the U.S., because Americans have tutored the Koreans during the past 45 years.

This study has discussed Korean anti-American sentiments and the rise of Korean nationalism. It is difficult to draw a line indicating where nationalism ends and where anti-American sentiment begins. Nonetheless, there must be a continuing open dialogue between the two countries to work out differences and to keep both the American and the Korean publics informed. Such dialogue will prevent future misinformation and misunderstandings. Both countries must accept constructive criticism as it is intended, without hiding behind nationalistic and emotional barriers. Through such tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, the U.S. and Korea should continue to maintain strong, healthy relations, which would support each country's vital interests.

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